

# Closing info just a call away

By Nora Engel  
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CAMDEN — Almost every parent of children in public schools has experienced the frustration of waking up on a snowy or foggy morning and tuning into the radio two seconds after the school closings were announced.

Public schools are making it much easier for parents and teachers to get that information with a new voice activation system.

A demonstration of the new system was held Monday at Caesar Rodney High School on Old North Road in Camden.

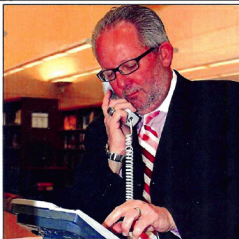
"As a parent, I remember many mornings of running down to the TV to see if the schools were opened and I always seemed to tune in just after the school was called, and I would have to wait for the list to run all over again," said Thomas Jarrett, the secretary of the state Department of Technology and Information. "It could be very frustrating."

He said the new system allows parents to call a toll-free phone number on days with questionable weather.

The caller selects the school and can hear its status of the school within minutes.

Mr. Jarrett said whether the school is delayed or closed, the information is put into the system as soon as school officials know.

Michelle Ackles, spokeswoman with the state Department of Technology and Information, said there was no direct cost for the system because it replaced other voice activation services.



Delaware State News/Dave Chambers

**Thomas Jarrett, secretary of the state Department of Technology and Information, demonstrates using the voice-activated school closing information system Monday at Caesar Rodney High School. The new system can handle thousands of calls per hour and the information is added as soon as the schools make a decision in closings or delays.**

"I always look at how to make it easier for the parents and how to work on their schedules, not ours," Mr. Jarrett said.

"We decided to take what is on the Web and make it voice-activated, because in reality not everyone has access to the Web."

The voice system is capable of handling up to 24,000 calls per hour and can handle 200 simultaneous calls.

The system was created in a collaboration between the Department of Technology and Information and the state Department of Education.

"This is a big step forward. Parents can make the call first thing in the morning and know right away so they can plan their day, whether that means day care

arrangements or other plans," Mr. Jarrett said.

"We are really excited about rolling out this service and what it is going to bring. We think it will be very successful."

He said the Web site for school closings, which was created in 2001, will remain available.

Mr. Jarrett said more than 15,000 people currently subscribe to the e-mail subscription, which sends alerts when the schools are delayed or closed.

The toll free number for the school status is (877) 831-7215; on the Web, go to [www.delaware.gov](http://www.delaware.gov) and click on "Delays & Closings."

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